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### Mapping Strategic Management Research

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# Mapping Strategic Management Research

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**DURING** the last two decades, in particular, there has developed a substantial body of literature in the fields of strategic management, strategic planning, corporate and business policy, and related topics. This literature owes much to the prior writings of Alfred Chandler [10] and the decades of case writing and research undertaken at Harvard Business School by many learned professors. Indeed, Harvard's tradition of leadership in this field dates from 1914 when it first introduced a course requirement for business policy into the business school program.

The term strategic management is of relatively recent origin [49] and is currently the accepted term for the fields of business policy and planning. However, as a separate field of study, it is still at a fairly young and relatively evolutionary stage. As a result, many definitions of strategy abound, and the terms "strategic planning," "policy," and "strategic management" often mean precisely the same thing to different authors. Whilst conflict about definitions, confusion and an abundance of jargon characterize scientific endeavor in an emerging field [32] this paper will focus on the following definitions of strategy.

## **ON THE MEANING OF STRATEGY**

Chandler's [10, p. 13] definition is perhaps the fundamental contribution to corporate strategy:

The determination of the basic long-term goals and the objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals.

This was amended and amplified by Andrews [3, p. 28] with the following well-accepted definition.

Corporate strategy is the pattern of major objectives, purposes or goals and essential policies or plans for achieving those goals, stated in such

a way as to define what business the company is in or is to be in and the kind of company it is or is to be.

Andrews and Chandler's definitions define strategy in terms of intentions. Mintzberg and Waters [39, p. 466] argue that organizations may sometimes pursue strategies they never intended. Hence, they propose that the usual definition of strategy be called "intended strategy" and that strategy in general and "realized strategy" be defined as "a pattern in a stream of decisions (actions)."

Strategic management will be interpreted in relation to Schendel and Hofer's [49] paradigm (see the Chart). This paradigm conceives of the management of strategy as consisting of the following steps and tasks; namely, goal formulation, environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy evaluation, strategy implementation and strategy control. While other paradigms have been suggested [8, 19] it is contended that Schendel and Hofer's paradigm is a practical and useful framework (albeit a conceptualization of strategic management as institutionalized entrepreneurship) with which to consider the research literature in strategic management.

From this, it follows that the objectives of this paper are

- (1) to review and classify the research literature in strategic management;
- (2) to make a plea for the adoption of "mixed scanning" perspectives for future research in the field;
- (3) to examine theory and suggest that theory development should be the most important aim for research;
- (4) to draw some broad conclusions about the field and future research directions.

## LITERATURE IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

It would be impossible within the scope of this paper to attempt an exhaustive review of the "state of the art" of strategic management research (although some of the more useful periodicals are shown in Appendix 1.) Indeed, the 1977 Pittsburgh Conference on strategic management (Schendel and Hofer [49]) used the organizing paradigm of the Chart to categorize "the state of the art" in the field. Also, a more recent conference in Arlington (February 1983) on "Significant Developments in Strategic Management" has provided an update of the themes presented in the Schendel and Hofer book.

Instead, in this section the research environment and the differing viewpoints held by strategy academics will be examined. This perspective is taken because it will be argued (using the information in Appendix 2) that, while the field is developing strongly, it suffers from an identity crisis

about its paradigms and lack of consensus about appropriate research directions and traditions.

If a panel of leading experts in the field were to review it, there would probably be consensus that none, or very few, of the set of social scientists on a business school faculty really sympathize with the policy area or even understand what it is about. In essence, policy is seen as an anomaly by academics because academics are, by definition, experts or specialists whereas policy is concerned with the issues, questions, and problems associated with general management. Policy, as a field, is, therefore, the antithesis of their need for orderliness and structure and their belief in research methodology grounded in the tradition of social science research methods.

Consequently, policy researchers must contend with a less well-structured environment. Further, Bower [8, p. 632] points out policy faculty and researchers lack a critical mass in most research institutions.

Only some of the faculty who teach the policy course regard policy as their field, and only some of the faculty have studied policy and its literature in a systematic way. Rarely does the group teaching policy at a particular school include more than two or three full-time committed faculty.

Leading policy academics certainly disagree about the content of policy and relevant areas of research. Bower [8, p. 630] somewhat irreverently quotes a gentleman by the name of Paul Cook who took part in a 1963 business policy conference at Harvard in the following manner:

Paul Cook argued that the way one determined the subject matter of policy was to gather together all the messy, unsolved, and perhaps undefined problems of importance characterizing business management. "As soon as a problem was understood," said he, "it was quickly incorporated as part of the subject matter for one of the functional disciplines."

One implication of Cook's statement (as Bower comments, it is correct but exaggerated) is that policy should probably concentrate on those very difficult, messy, ambiguous, and ill-structured problems involved in formulating and implementing corporate ends and aim to provide a reasonable model of thinking about those very muddled and ambiguous situations. It is far too easy for researchers to examine those more well-structured questions and problems that have already been well treated by researchers in policy and other disciplines.

Bower [8, p. 632] argues that a definition of strategy, such as Andrews' [3], is a much more useful organizing paradigm for the field since it takes a holistic perspective. Once strategic management paradigms (such as

Schendel and Hofer's [49] version shown in the Chart) treat corporate strategy as consisting of several parts — goal formulation, strategy formulation, strategy planning, and so on — then Bower argues that researchers may be trapped into studying one of these parts as if it existed in the firm as a separate activity.

Appendix 2 throws further insight upon this issue. The articles of Anshen and Guth [4], Bower [8], Jemison [25], and Saunders and Thompson [48], which discuss strategies for research in policy, were chosen to provide varying definitions of what policy research is, or indeed, should be.

Anshen and Guth [4] state that the policy area “lags all others in the development of a body of theory and formal analytic techniques” [4, p. 499]. They argue that this lack of theory and formal analytic techniques requires that at least four basic alternative research strategies be adopted to improve the research capital of the field. They suggest that these strategies should be as follows. First, the study of science and art in policy formulation. Second, the design and use of analytic concepts and operational approaches. Third, the study of historical relationships and implementation problems. Fourth, the examination of the interface of policy formulation with social problems and with other institutions.

Bower [8, p. 632] argues that research in policy should concentrate upon the life and death issues of concern to the top management of firms. In the 1980s environment, he believes that much greater attention must be directed towards corporate management of the boundaries and interfaces between business and government. In addition, many corporate problems now have a multinational focus involving competition and marketing on a global scale. Bower wants research in this field to be more exploratory and long-range and seek to identify new problems, with albeit small case-study type samples, in painstaking but scholarly manner. His research strategy is to attack “the elephants” and enrich the field rather than pursue “the ants” by looking at well-structured problems (and “estimating  $R^2$  on relationships that have been recognized to be true since biblical times” [8, p. 637]. He also recognizes that this research strategy raises the questions of rewards for policy academics. Put another way, can policy researchers be promoted by doing case studies and action research?

Jemison [25, p. 601] states that “strategic management has reached the point where integrative research approaches are necessary for continued progress in the field.” He advocates the development initially of mid-range theories that draw from, and attempt to integrate, disciplines such as marketing, administrative behavior, and economics that contribute to our understanding of strategic management. Such mid-range theories then form the basis from which richer integrative, hypothesis-testing research will, hopefully emerge. He suggests that opportunities for research cross-

fertilization exist in the areas of joint evolution of industries, markets, and organizations, in content and process research integration, and in the domain of interorganizational analysis.

Saunders and Thompson [48] analyzed papers submitted for the 1979 Academy of Management Meetings in Atlanta in terms of the Schendel/Hofer classification of the field. Thirty-five percent of the submitted papers addressed issues in category 1, the process of strategy formulation ( $\frac{2}{3}$  being about formulation and  $\frac{1}{3}$  about content). Thirty percent of the papers fell in category 2 ( $\frac{2}{3}$  being about environmental analysis and  $\frac{1}{3}$  being about goal formulation and structures) and 25 percent of the papers fell in category 5 (fully 80 percent of them being about the strategic management process). Of the residual 15 percent,  $\frac{1}{3}$  addressed implementation,  $\frac{1}{3}$  addressed formal planning, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  general management issues.

Overall, only 20 percent of the papers submitted involved theory testing, and 60 percent were conceptual pieces directed towards theory building. The residual 20 percent were empirical papers directed towards theory building.

Saunders and Thompson state [48, p. 128] that

As might be expected, smaller-scale investigative undertakings typify the mix of topics, since the narrower compass of "elements" research makes it simpler and more straightforward than 'process' research.

This simplicity also makes it attractive for policy researchers aiming for a smooth promotion path. Further, in comparing conceptual with empirical research [48, p. 129] they speculate that "a turn away (in research) from feeble attempts at the insight type and toward hard examination of applicable data in an empirical framework is what is needed now." They argue that important and valuable conceptual papers are few and far between.

None of the four authors depicted in Appendix 2 believe that research in policy is impossible. However, they differ in two respects. First, they use varying definitions of what policy research is. Second, they emphasize the importance of different aspects of the field.

Bower would argue for the best possible *field research* involving case inquiry into the behavior of practitioners followed by conceptualization of this behavior. This would be carried out in a scholarly manner using carefully specified rules of evidence. The aim is to achieve a careful, accurate description of important issues, problems, and phenomena in the broad general management field, with particular emphasis on management in a "boundary-spanning" role operating between the intra-organization, government, and multinational environments. Saunders and Thompson believe that *methodological and empirical research areas* should be emphasized. They favor *model building, hypothesis testing, and new models and techniques*

for strategy research. Anshen and Guth prescribe a mix of *empirical testing and explanatory, conceptual research* on a broader strategic canvas (nearer and closer to Andrews' holistic strategy definition) with a clear aim directed towards the promotion of richer theory building and development for the field. Jemison, in many respects, echoes the position taken by Anshen and Guth but with strong emphasis on the need for *integrative, multi-disciplinary research* in the field.

Perhaps the only strong consensus between these authors would be their lack of interest in well-written but rather empty papers full of conjecture and plausible statements incapable of being tested or further researched. Such offerings typically emanate from practitioners, consultants, and less research-oriented academics. In addition, they might all agree that a mix of exploratory theory building with scientific hypothesis testing research would be worthwhile for theory development. They would certainly not agree on the "weightings" which should be given to the various elements of the mix and this is a reasonable expectation. As long as the conduct of research involves alternative perspectives and viewpoints, the future diet of researchable topics is likely to be much more extensive, well constructed, and valuable.

#### **"MIXED SCANNING" AND STRATEGY RESEARCH**

It is a continuing difficulty in the management research field that the same, or related, aspects of management practice can be examined through such a wide variety of disciplinary "lenses." The variety does have its advantages in aiding the understanding of complex situations, but it has probably also added some confusion to the study of policy, strategy formulation, and planning. The viewpoints available include, at one extreme, one that regards strategic decision-making as an instance of organizational politics, to be understood entirely in terms of the relative power positions and political ploys of a set of influential "actors." At the other extreme, is a viewpoint based on a comprehensively rational model of decision-making, which can be facilitated by such techniques as decision and risk analysis [22, 40]. Intermediate stances can be adopted, as for example, the "mixed scanning" approach of Etzioni [16].

The practical manager, involved in some aspect of strategy or policy, can probably think of instances in which one or the other of these models is a good fit, and yet discussion often proceeds on the lines of rejecting one of them on the basis that contrary instances can be found. The matter is further confounded by the different positions, descriptive, explanatory, or normative, which protagonists positions take up.

The stance adopted here is both explanatory and normative. It attempts to demonstrate that a useful measure of reconciliation can be achieved

amongst the various viewpoints, and that this has both theoretical and practical advantages in regard to the advancement of strategic management. In developing this theme, it is necessary to break away from the assumption which is often implicitly made, that is, that a corporate body “thinks” and “acts” like a person. From an external vantage point, a company may look to have a corporate persona, but this is an outcome, not a description of how its strategy is formed. Partly in order to ensure that no such implicit assumption is made, but mainly because of the existence of situations in which policy is formed by several bodies, often including government, the discussion will be set in a multi-organizational framework.

Therefore, in this part of the paper, a “mixed scanning” perspective for strategic management research is presented. It involves examining the contribution of the alternative disciplinary “lenses” and approaches to theory building in Strategic Management. Appendix 3 gives a listing of alternative perspectives, and the researchers whose work is most closely associated with those perspectives.

The fields of economics, finance, and analytic modeling provide rationalistic perspectives for the strategy process. For example, Porter’s influential volume on competitive strategy provides frameworks for analyzing the effects of different market conditions such as differentiated oligopoly on corporate strategies and anticipated strategic positions. [42].

The other models listed, for example, PIMS, Experience Curves, and BCG, involve empirical research using data bases to investigate relationships between such variables as profitability and market share, accumulated experience and cost, and growth and market share.

Marketing provides viewpoints, concepts, and methodologies for strategic management. Biggadike states it in the following terms [6, p. 621]:

Theory building contributions are few. The marketing concept stresses that customers are the focal point of strategy... Segmentation partitions customers into groups with common needs and the positioning concept frames strategic choice as decisions about which segments to serve and with whom to compete. An emerging theory of market evolution helps dynamic analysis of customers, competitors, and strategic choices.

Therefore, the marketing discipline views strategy as being a market-driven phenomenon and, consequently, provides tools for customer and competitive analysis.

The historical case study approach to strategy research has a process orientation and involves the examination of observational data, drawn from various sources, concerning the organizational patterns and strategies that evolve over a long-term historical time horizon. Chandler’s extensive historical research yielded conceptual theories relating strategy, structure, and environment, namely, that “a company’s strategy in time determined



its structure" (10, p. 476). This theme led to a stream of more empirical hypothesis-testing research on strategy and structure best exemplified by Rumelt [46].

Political scientists such as Lindblom [34] and Allison [2] examine public policymaking processes and suggest alternative models of policymaking based on concepts such as adaptation ("muddling through"), rationalism, organizational processes, and bureaucratic political perspectives.

Researchers in psychology (Hogarth [23]) have identified numerous information processing limitations and biases in human judgment. Hogarth and Makradakis [24] have argued that many of these may apply to tasks performed in forecasting and strategic planning. For example, the existence of the judgmental bias of "illusion of control" (Langer [29]) can be interpreted to suggest that those strategists involved in the activities of strategic planning and management may act under the "illusion" that they have some degree of control over an uncertain future. Other sources of judgmental bias such as overconfidence in judgment, failure to seek possible contradictory evidence, and accumulation of redundant information are also suggested as potentially serious in the context of managerial judgment about corporate strategic direction.

Organization theorists have studied such process questions as the structuring of organizations and organizational power and have provided models for use in the policy literature. For example, Kotter's study of effective general managers, using painstaking field research and diary approaches, shows them to be more informal, less systematic, and more adaptive than a proponent of rational models or formal planning systems would assume [28]. Careful studies of this type can, therefore, enrich planning systems research and suggest areas for improvement in planning systems design.

Process training research in strategic decision-making is a tradition that started at Carnegie with Cyert, Simon, and Trow's study [14] involving the observation of a business decision and has continued through Mintzberg's studies [38] on patterns in strategy formulation. The tradition of all these studies is careful observation of unstructured decision processes (sometimes using a historical perspective) with a view to cataloging and interpreting the strategic decision processes. This interpretive process leads to conceptualization and emergent themes such as the observation that strategy formulation over time appears to follow life cycle and change cycle patterns in organizations.

The policy dialogue lens is the theme that serves to integrate the contributions of various disciplines and approaches to strategic management. By "mixed scanning" of these alternative perspectives, a useful measure of reconciliation amongst the various viewpoints in a management

team can be achieved through a process of continuous policy dialogue. This involves the use of a consensus process such as strategic assumptions analysis [36] to generate meaningful debate and, thereby, to resolve inconsistencies in alternative analyses, viewpoints, and policy assumptions.

In our view the task of policy planning and strategy should not consist of attempting to demonstrate the superiority of one approach or framework for all situations but rather of showing their mutual dependency.... Whatever methods are used they should always aid in challenging strategic planning assumptions.

## **THEORY IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND POLICY**

Anshen and Guth [4] earlier pointed to the need for theory development in the field of strategic management. However, just as Koontz [27] noted that there was no general theory of management, so it is equally unlikely that such a theory will be found in the strategy field. This suggests that theory search should be directed towards contingency theories and theoretical models with which to analyze policy questions.

It seems that two elements, namely, potential alternative courses of action and the existence of a preference ordering on outcomes, define the structure of policymaking or strategy. Making policy or corporate strategy consists of choosing among alternative courses of action that, it is believed, will attain the most preferred outcome (taking account of *all* the costs involved in decision-making.) It follows, therefore, that *prediction* of the outcome of alternative courses of action is an integral part of the strategy-making process. However, prediction requires theory or theories that causally relate action to outcome. Such theories are a necessary condition for selecting policies independent of

- (1) the ability (or lack thereof) to quantify outcomes,
- (2) the level of uncertainty that exists about outcomes, and
- (3) the nature of the preference ordering.

What then are the characteristics of theory in this area and how might theory develop? First, some of the theory base will, and ought to, be derived from the alternative theories, frameworks, and lenses developed in other disciplines. For example, the rapid acceptance, and pervasive popularity of Porter's competitive strategy material [42], attests to the policy area's voracious appetite for good derivative theory obtained from the industry and market analysis research tradition in microeconomics and industrial organization. Second, theory development needs to incorporate both rational/analytical and behavioral/political perspectives. Third, since policy and strategy problems are complex involving many variables and considerable ambiguity, theory development will be slow. It is more likely that useful theory will emerge from inductive, creative, intensive field

research models (such as those using historical and process-tracing perspectives). The important issues and problems would first be explained, in an inductive process, from field data, which might in turn lead to the deductive testing of some propositions derived from the set of inductive generalizations. Fourth, content studies may also be undertaken to throw light upon strategies in specific application contexts. Whilst these are more limited in scope, they are more specific and generally easier for researchers to undertake.

Finally, it would appear that the most fruitful paths for theory development are either through adaptation of theories from other disciplines to the policy context or by performing inductive field-like studies that will generate hypotheses for specific testing through successive deductive phases of the research process.

### **CONCLUSIONS, CURRENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

There is little doubt that the strategic management field will continue to grow and develop in the future. This is partially because of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business' (AACSB) requirements for undergraduate and graduate policy courses in business schools that generate demand for new policy area faculty (and hence facilitate entry of committed researchers into the profession). Perhaps a more important reason is the increasing corporate awareness of a messy, politicized environment in which the menu of options is both limited and complex and in which government and global competition are increasingly important forces.

Since strategy's fare is complex, ill-structured problems, it is useful to cast the strategic management process as involving elements of a complex inquiry system based upon the examination of alternative perspectives and a "simulation" of entrepreneurial activity through institutionalizing the strategy-making process. Therefore, a top manager needs to first build his strategic agenda through careful inquiry and examination of his problems in terms of alternative "mixed scanning frameworks" (so called "theories"). Armed with an adequate strategic problem formulation, he can then determine the means of achieving and implementing strategic agendas by examining process aspects in terms of an organizing paradigm such as in the Chart. That is, he should examine the degree to which his strategy choice would be consistent with the pressures of the external environment, the corporation's goals and resources, the risk-taking propensities of the corporation, and the culture and value systems embedded within the organization.

If the previously articulated view of the strategic management process is accepted, then it would appear that there is a need to continually develop the theory base of the field (using alternative perspectives) and design

strategic inquiry systems that adequately model the managerial processes of debate and dialogue prior to choice and action.

## **Appendix I**

### Useful Strategic Management Periodicals

*Academy of Management Journal*  
*Academy of Management Review*  
*Administrative Science Quarterly*  
*Business and Society*  
*Business Horizons*  
*California Management Review*  
*Harvard Business Review*  
*Journal of Business*  
*Journal of Business Strategy*  
*Journal of General Management*  
*Journal of Management Studies*  
*Long-Range Planning*  
*Management Decision*  
*Omega*  
*Organizational Dynamics*  
*Policy Sciences*  
*Policy Studies Journal*  
*Sloan Management Review*  
*Strategic Management Journal*

## **Appendix II**

### Statements About Research Areas in Strategic Management

*Anshen and Guth [4, pp. 507-511]*  
(Broad multi-disciplinary research canvas)

#### **1. Science and Art in Policy Formulation**

(Examination of the bounds of rationality in policy formulation)

- Empirical study of top management decisions to delineate limits of rationality in such decisions.
- Conceptual development of multi-disciplinary theory of the policy formulation process.
- Construction of mathematical models/simulations of the policy formulation process.
- Study of the "art" components of policy formulation.

#### **2. Design and Test of Analytical Concepts and Operational Approaches**

- Study of decision heuristics in unstructured situations.
- Strategic planning systems in rapidly changing environments.
- Social performance measurement of organizations.
- MIS for policy formulation and implementation.
- Strategy and organizational design.
- Performance measurement systems.
- Design of strategy formulation processes for strategic decision-making.

#### **3. Historical Relationships and Implementation Problems**

(List of relationships for empirical study)

- Environment sets in relation to successful/unsuccessful organizations.
- Management values in relation to strategic choice.

- Organizational strategies vs. organizational structures.
  - Organizational structures vs. measures of performance.
  - Organizational levels in relation to measures of performance in different organizational structures.
  - Leadership styles vs. strategy and organizational form.
- 4. Interface of Business Policy Formulation with Social Problems and Other Institutions**  
 Interorganizational analysis *Bower* [8, p. 636] (business/ government multi-national foci)
- 1. Management problems of rapid growth and their socio-economic implications.**
  - 2. Management problems of declining industries and regions.**
  - 3. Top management of large complex firms — studies of entrepreneurs and strategists — what are the administrative aspects of complex strategy?**
  - 4. What does portfolio management mean for large companies? Why do CEO's introduce such systems?**
  - 5. Can anything be said about the mix of large and small firms from a business policy perspective?**
  - 6. Depth studies of particular regional and environmental problems.**
  - 7. Global industries.**

*Jemison* [25] (Integrative, multi-disciplinary focus)

- 1. Determination of the relationship among the evolution of industries, markets and organizations.**
- 2. Methods for integration of process and content strategic management research.**
- 3. Examination of the relationships between, and influence of, inter-organizational analysis on strategy formulation.**

*Saunders and Thompson* [48, p. 122] (Slight amendment by Saunders and Thompson of Schendel and Hofer [49])

**1. Strategy Formulation Process**

- Strategy Concept
- Strategy Formulation
- Strategy Evaluation
- Strategy Content

**2. Strategy Formulation Elements**

- Goal Formulation/Structures
- Social Responsibility
- Environmental Analysis
- Public Policy

**3. Strategy Implementation Process**

- Strategy Implementation

**4. Strategy Implementation Elements**

- Formal Planning Systems
- Strategic Control

**5. Strategy Management Process**

- Strategy Management Process
- Boards of Directors
- General Management Roles

**6. Other**

- Entrepreneurship and new ventures
- Multi-business/multi-cultural forms
- Strategic management in not-for-profit organizations
- Research methods

## Appendix III

### Categorization of Alternative Lenses and Approaches for Strategy Research

Lenses/Approaches	Research Tradition	References
History	Case Development	[3]
	Mapping of corporate strategy over long-term historical perspective	[10, 11] [12]
Economics	Mapping industry changes over time	[30]
	Industrial Organization/ Microeconomic Analysis Strategy/Structure	[42, 43] [9]
Finance	Performance	[46]
	Portfolio Theory Capital Asset Pricing	[13] [35, 47]
Marketing	Financial Statement Analysis	[18]
	Product Life Cycle Segmentation	[33, 15] [56]
Political Science	Planning	[1]
	Study of Policymaking Processes in Government	[34] [2]
Psychology	Laboratory Experimentation in Judgment Research	[17] [23, 24, 29, 54]
	Organizational Behavior	Organizational Structure
Power in Organizations		[41]
Studies of General Managers		[28]
Strategy Types and Structure		[37]
Environments and Organizations		[31]
Leadership Research		[55]
Analytical Modeling	Administrative Behavior	[26]
	Decision Analysis	[40, 45, 52]
	Modelling	[5]
	PIMS (Profit Impact on Market Strategies)	[50]
	Experience Curve Analysis	[20]
	BCG Portfolio Matrix	[21]
Process Tracing in Strategic Decision-Making	Mapping and Tracking Strategy Processes	[14] [7, 38, 44]
	Policy Dialogue	Conflicting Assumptions in Decision Making

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Chart

**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PARADIGM**

(Adapted from Schendel and Hofer, 1979)

